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Ms L Cousins
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Cousins

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: leadership of more than one school

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 20 and 21 January 2011 to look at the leadership of the federation.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with senior leaders, middle leaders, governors, staff, parents, local authority representatives, and pupils, and the scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The effectiveness of the federation leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement is satisfactory.

Context

College Gardens Nursery School and Wellington Primary School federated in 2006. In 2007, the nursery school moved into the building it now shares with the primary school and the new Ridgeway Park Children Centre which also became part of the federation. Originally, the federation was lead jointly by the headteachers of both schools. Following staffing changes, the headteacher of the primary school was appointed recently to lead the federation. At the time of the inspection, the local authority had approved the amalgamation of the two schools.

Outcomes

- Children make good progress in College Gardens Nursery School and their attainment is broadly average by the time they leave. However, weaknesses exist in children's communication, literacy and language skills. Pupils make satisfactory progress at Wellington Primary School. Standards at Key Stage 1 are below average. In 2008 and 2009, the most recent years for which validated data are available, attainment in mathematics and English at Key Stage 2 was broadly average. Nonetheless, there is a steady trend of improvement, particularly at Key Stage 1.
- Attendance is just below average in Wellington Primary School. The federation has introduced a number of useful measures to improve attendance but the impact of these has yet to be seen.
- Behaviour is good in both schools, as are the attitudes to learning of children and pupils. This reflects the positive ethos that exists across the federation.

Provision

- The quality of teaching is improving across the federation, as a result of recent initiatives in Wellington Primary School on teaching and learning. Some effective steps have been taken to spread good practice in teaching by moving some staff between schools. Planning in the joint Early Years Foundation Stage has been improved by the effective work of the Early Years Foundation Stage manager who works across both schools.
- A number of useful steps have been taken recently to enrich the curriculum in both schools, such as the introduction of Black History Month and Multilingual Month. The skills of some staff in one school have been used well to deliver the latter initiative in the other. Good links between the Nursery and Reception classes mean that children can sing and listen to stories together and that work in phonics can be more closely matched to children's abilities.
- The care, guidance and support that children and pupils receive have been particularly strengthened by federation. Transition arrangements for children have benefited from the recent relocation of Reception classrooms so that they are close to the Nursery school. Both schools make good use of the Children's Centre to support parents and vulnerable children and pupils.

Leadership and management

- Until recently, the impact of federation has been limited, as both schools have largely operated separately. Nonetheless, potential barriers to federation, such as extensive building work, initial parental concerns and discontinuity in staffing, have been handled well. Close teamwork between the new leader of the federation and the acting headteacher of the Nursery school and Children's Centre is providing increasingly clear direction and a stronger sense of common purpose for the federation. This is reflected in the high morale of staff.

- The links between the schools have focused chiefly on the Early Years Foundation Stage. Its leader has ensured good liaison between the Nursery and Reception classes and improved assessment procedures so that children's progress is recorded more accurately. The roles of other middle leaders are underdeveloped across the federation as staff have had few opportunities to work in the partner school.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning draws too heavily on support from the local authority's improvement services. The federation's evaluation of its effectiveness is generally accurate. Its development plan is detailed but does not focus sharply enough on how the federation as a whole can be developed.
- Relationships with parents are good. Their views are sampled and they consider federation leaders to be open and approachable. Communication with parents about the work of the federation is satisfactory. Although each school's newsletter mentions activities taking place in the other settings, there is scope to use them to promote the federation's profile more strongly.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing the roles of middle leaders across the federation and providing more opportunities for staff to work in the partner school
- sharpening development planning so that planned improvements cover both schools
- strengthening arrangements for the monitoring of teaching.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the leadership of the federation.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy
Her Majesty's Inspector